Virtual Book Group

The simplest possible design —
groups.io for the list, Google Meet for the talk

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Virtual Book Group (VBG)

Groups.io for the member list, Google Meet for the talk

Join by email: send a blank email to VBG+subscribe@groups.io **Post to everyone:** VBG@groups.io **Leave anytime:** VBG+unsubscribe@groups.io

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The whole idea in five sentences

1. Anyone in the group may **offer a session** as host on any book.
2. The host emails the group with the book, the date, the time, and a Google Meet link.
3. Whoever is interested clicks the link at that hour.
4. They talk for about an hour.
5. The host emails a short note afterward. That is all there is.

No committees, no dues, no reading assignments, no attendance, no software to install.

Why these two tools

Need	Tool	Cost
Reach everyone at once, no app required	groups.io email list	Free up to 100 members (Groups.io pricing)
See and hear each other	Google Meet	Free: up to 100 people, 60 minutes per group call (Google Meet requirements)

Both work on a smartphone, tablet, PC, or Mac.Two limits worth knowing up front, because the design is built around them rather than

fighting them:

- A free Meet call with three or more people **ends automatically at 60 minutes**, with a warning at 50 (Google support). So VBG sessions are 55 minutes by design. If a group wants more, the host simply re-sends the same link and everyone rejoins.
- A **free** groups.io group is email only — no calendar, files, or wiki (Groups.io owner guide). That is fine. Everything below travels in plain email.

Setting up the group (one time, about 20 minutes)

Step 1 — Create the group. Go to groups.io, create a group named VBG. Choose the **Free** plan.

Step 2 — Set four options and ignore the rest.

Setting	Choose	Why
Group privacy	Listed, anyone can join	So a shut-in who hears about it can join without asking permission
Message policy	Unmoderated (or moderate the first post from each new member)	Keeps announcements instant
Reply-to	**Group**	A question about a session gets answered where everyone sees it
Subject-line prefix	[VBG]	Members can spot and file the mail easily

Step 3 — Write the group description. Paste in "The whole idea in five sentences" above.

Step 4 — Set the welcome message. New members get it automatically. Draft below.

Step 5 — Name two co-owners. Not for authority — so the group survives illness, travel, or a hospital stay. This is the single most important step for a shut-in community.

That is the entire administrative structure. There is no other officer, no schedule keeper, no librarian.

Hosting a session (any member, any book, any time)

A host does three things.

1. Make the meeting link

Open meet.google.com, click **New meeting** → **Create a meeting for later**, and copy the link. It stays good indefinitely. Anyone without a Google account can still join — the host just clicks **Admit** when they knock (Google Workspace).

Tip: a host may reuse the *same* link for every session they ever run. Regulars learn it by heart.

2. Send one email to **VBG@groups.io**

Use this exact shape so every announcement looks alike:

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Subject: OFFER — "Book Title" by Author — Thu Aug 20, 2:00 PM ET

Book: Title, Author (year, ~300 pages)
When: Thursday, August 20, 2:00–2:55 PM Eastern
Where: https://meet.google.com/hji-fiiq-bnx
By phone: (dial-in number shown on the Meet page)
Host: Your Name

Read it, skim it, or come having read nothing — all welcome.
Three questions I'd like us to chew on:
  1. ...
  2. ...
  3. ...
```

Just show up. No RSVP needed.

Send it **about two weeks ahead**, then a one-line reminder the **morning of**. Two emails per session. Never more.

3. Run the hour

Minutes	What happens
0–5	Host admits latecomers, everyone says their first name
5–10	Host gives a 3-minute sketch of the book — for those who didn't read it
10–45	The three questions, in order; host calls on people by name so no one is talked over
45–52	"What did this book leave you with?" — one sentence each, around the circle
52–55	Anyone want to host next? Host says goodnight before Google cuts the line

Afterward: a three-line email to the group — who came, what struck people, what's next.

Rules of the road (post these once, in the welcome message)

1. **Anyone may host.** You do not need permission, expertise, or a following.
2. **No one has to have finished the book.** Curiosity is the only ticket.
3. **Cameras optional.** A voice is enough. So is listening in silence.

4. **One hour, ending on time.** People with caregivers and medication schedules need the clock respected.
5. **Talk about the book.** Politics and religion are welcome only as the book raises them.
6. **Nobody is dropped for missing sessions.** Ever.

The welcome message (copy as-is)

Welcome to the Virtual Book Group.

VBG is a group of people who read and then talk about it — from a chair, a bed, or a kitchen table, wherever you are.

To take part: watch for emails with OFFER in the subject line. Each one names a book, a date, and a Google Meet link. If it interests you, click the link at that hour. That is the whole procedure. No sign-up, no reply needed.

If you have never used Google Meet: click the link about five minutes early. Your device will ask permission to use the camera and microphone — say yes. If a screen says "Ask to join," click it and the host will let you in. You do not need a Google account. If your device has no camera, that is fine; you will still hear everyone.

To offer a session of your own: you are already qualified. Write to VBG@groups.io with the book, a date, a time, and a Meet link.

To leave: email VBG+unsubscribe@groups.io. No hard feelings, and you may come back.

Welcome aboard.

Growing it, gently

The temptation will be to add structure. Resist it. If VBG works, it will

show up as more OFFER emails, not more machinery. Two optional additions, in the order they become worth it:

1. **A monthly "what's coming" email** — one message listing the next few offers, once the group runs more than two sessions a month.
2. **A buddy for the technically anxious** — one volunteer who will do a 10-minute private Meet practice call with any new member. This will recruit more members than anything else you do.

Do not add: dues, a voted-on book of the month, required attendance, a second mailing list, or a website.

The first thirty days

Week	Action
1	Create the group. Recruit two co-owners. Invite 10–15 people you know personally, by individual email — not a mass blast.
2	Host the first session yourself. Pick something short and warm. Keep it to 55 minutes even if it's going well.
3	Email the group asking, plainly: "Who will take the next one?" Then wait. Somebody will.
4	Host the practice call for anyone still nervous about Meet. Then step back and let the offers come.

The group is healthy the first time a session happens that you neither hosted nor arranged.

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